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THE CATHOLIC LAYMAN.

Glóir do Dhia an rna hárduib, agur ríodcán air an dtalam beagtoil do na daoibh.

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THE DEAD HAND—MORTMAIN.

There is no subject which we think ought to be urged more frequently on the attention of Roman Catholic laymen than the obvious tendency which the leading doctrines and rules of discipline, by which the Roman Catholic Church differs from the other professing Christian Churches, have to promote and extend the power and influence of the clergy, and to enrich the great ecclesiastical corporation of which they are members. And when they remember that the same body which derives such power, influence, and wealth from those doctrines and that discipline, as far as they can, stifle and forbid all inquiry into and discussion of them, it surely should excite suspicion in their minds that the origin and foundation of those doctrines and rules will not bear investigation and discussion.

In the ordinary transactions of life, this undoubtedly would be the result. Take, for example, a familiar instance. If the heir to a large estate was told that his father had made a will limiting and restricting the rights the law would otherwise have conferred upon him; that, by that will, the possession of his father's inheritance was subject to conditions, and clogged with limitations, which nothing but the clearest expression of intention on the part of the parent would induce a court of law to give effect to; that, instead of becoming his own master at the age which the law recognises as the age of discretion, he was to remain in tutelage and under the control of guardians during all his natural life; that his conduct and actions throughout the whole of his existence were to be regulated by their wishes and directions. Would he not, in such a case, examine most scrupulously the authenticity and construction of that will? Would he not subject it to investigation, and test its legality? And if, on demanding inspection of the instrument imposing such restrictions on him, he was to be told by those in whose possession the will was, and who claimed to be the guardians appointed by it, that he should not be allowed any opportunity of making such investigations; what, we ask, would be his course under such circumstances? Would any man, in such a case, tamely acquiesce in the claims put forward by the alleged guardians? Would he quietly resign those rights which the laws of his country bestowed upon him, and yield implicit belief to the assertions of those whose interest it was to keep him in tutelage and ignorance? On the contrary, would he not vehemently suspect that the alleged will had no real existence, or was, at least, erroneously interpreted? Now, if such would be our conduct in the ordinary transactions of life, why do we not apply the same reasoning and the same inferences to spiritual matters? We all, in the words of Scripture, are heirs of God and joint-heirs of Christ; heirs of that will and testament delivered by God the Father through his Son, and sealed by his blood—joint-heirs of that eternal life revealed in that will. The Church of Rome and her priests say they are the appointed guardians and interpreters of that will; and, as they interpret it,

the joint-heirship to eternal life is limited and controlled at the will and pleasure of themselves as guardians; and when the disinherited layman asks to see and inspect the will in question, these self-constituted guardians indignantly refuse to satisfy his curiosity.

We ask, therefore, Roman Catholic laymen, ought not this refusal to excite their suspicions as to the real contents of the will and testament of their Heavenly Father? Are they willing to resign their birthright at the bidding of those who say that birthright belongs only to those who submit in all things to their rule and governance? And when they find that every one of those doctrines, and all those rules of discipline which other churches reject as not contained in that will, tend materially to promote the power, influence, and wealth of those self-constituted guardians, surely the suspicion created by their refusal to allow free interpretation of the will assumes new force and increased strength, and ought to be removed only by the clearest and most unimpeachable evidence. That such is their tendency we will now endeavour to show, and for that purpose will notice more in detail some of the principal of them.

In ecclesiastical government and discipline the most marked difference between the Church of Rome and that of England may be found in the forced celibacy of the clergy, and in the recognition and encouragement of monasteries and nunneries. By the former of these the clergy are severed from all those ties which would otherwise bind and connect the clergy with their lay brethren. To the individual so severed the exaltation of the church is the only object of ambition. Shut out from the ordinary affections and charities of social life, his existence is wrapt up in that of the corporation to which he belongs. Is he pious? His piety hopes for the spread of religion through the extended dominion of the church. Is he ambitious? His ambition can only be gratified by the supremacy and exaltation of that body to which he belongs. Is he selfish and self-indulgent? That selfishness and self-indulgence finds its easiest gratification in the increased wealth and importance of the same body. Take, again, the institution of monasteries and nunneries. Their vows are vows of poverty; but that vow is only as to the individual member, and does not interfere with the acquisition of wealth by the society of which he is a member; and when we remember the age at which persons become members of those institutions, the class of society from which alone novices are sought, it would be, perhaps, impossible to devise institutions more calculated to accumulate wealth; and such, indeed, practically has been their effect in every country and in all past ages of the world.

Again, if we take the distinguishing doctrines of the Church of Rome in matters of faith, the result is the same. It is hardly necessary to point out how materially the doctrine of the infallibility of the church tends to exalt the clergy, who are the only recognised agents in disclosing and interpreting its infallible decrees. For though, theoretically they may say that the infallibility resides in general councils, or in the Pope himself, or in the received tradition of the church, practically the teaching of the individual priest, claiming, of course, to be in conformity with the doctrines of their church, and forbidding inquiry and discussion by the laity, is put forward by each with a claim to infallibility. Again, in the doctrines of purgatory, of confession, and of priestly absolution, not only is the priest exalted, but who does not see that, in them, unfailing sources are opened up for pouring into the coffers of the church the wealth of weak and frightened sinners? Tell the weak and pious devotee that the remission of his sins is in the hands of his priestly adviser—that by his absolution the pains of purgatory may be alleviated and abridged. His piety tells him that, notwithstanding all his prayers and all his desire to serve God, he is still but an unprofitable servant; and with all this consciousness of sin about him, is it likely that, at the approach of death, he would resist the exhortation to bestow his goods on those who would use them for the alleged good of his soul? Nor are the same doctrines less effectual with the profligate and worldly-minded. Tell such a one, when the approach of death warns him that he is soon to leave those pleasures and riches which constitute his happiness in this

world, that his condition in a future state depends on the bestowal or withholding of the last rites of the church, and then suggest that his peace with God may be made by the devotion of that wealth he can himself no longer enjoy to so-called pious uses. Every feeling of his selfish and hardened heart is enlisted in favour of such a disposition of his goods. That very selfishness which never hesitated to sacrifice the interests of others to the gratification of his own desires, or the advancement of his own interest, will now make him sacrifice the temporal interests of those nearest and dearest to him to that which is now paramount in his thoughts—namely, his spiritual safety.

We might extend these observations more at length; but we have noticed them in this brief manner as an introduction to a document to which we hope to call the attention of our readers more in detail in succeeding numbers. We allude to the recent report, presented by the Mortmain Committee to the House of Commons. In that remarkable mass of evidence we have numerous instances of the practical workings of the Roman Catholic system. There we will find detailed how unscrupulously the emissaries of Rome pursue, with calumny and persecution, those who dare to dispute her claims to universal obedience. How indefatigably she prosecutes her great object, of bringing all matters, whether spiritual or temporal, under her guidance and control. How the vow of obedience and poverty becomes the instrument of extorting from the unhappy devotees that property, all claim to which was supposed to have been renounced on admission within the walls of the convent. And, above all, there will be found numerous and well-established cases, in which the weak and aged, in the very hour of dissolution, at the instigation of their spiritual advisers, and in many instances by their intervention, in actually framing the necessary documents, have forgotten the claims of relations and friends, and have impoverished their own families, in order to swell the wealth and promote the objects of the Romish Church. We hope to proceed with this subject in our next.

WHO WAS THE FIRST ABSENTEE BISHOP?

In the first article of our first number, which formed the prospectus of our periodical, and, as it were, struck the key-note to which our other articles were to be attuned, we spoke of the misfortunes of Ireland, and the way to remedy them, as a subject which should engage our especial attention. It may, perhaps, then have struck some of our readers as an omission, that we, in our last volume, have not said a word about absentees. To give a dissertation on absentee landlords, however, would but ill harmonize with the other topics of our paper; so we hope our readers will be satisfied if we give them instead a few of our thoughts on absentee bishops.

It seems plain enough, that if an absentee landlord be a bad thing, an absentee bishop is even worse. The meaning of the word bishop is an overseer; and what supervision can be exercised by one who is habitually absent? How can one far removed from them keep a watch over the faith and morals of his flock? And if, even with modern facilities of communication, a non-resident bishop must be felt to be one who neglects his duty, what must have been the case in ancient times, when penny-postage, and railroads, and electric telegraphs were unknown, and when such things had not been imagined, even in fairy tales? Accordingly, the practice of non-residence was almost unknown in the primitive church; and there exist both canons of councils and sayings of Fathers condemning anything resembling it. "Having read the Scriptures," says St. Athanasius (Apol. i.), "you know how great an offence it is for a bishop to forsake his church, and to neglect the flocks of God." Pope Paschal II. says, in his 22nd epistle—"Bishops ought to be disentangled from secular cares, and take charge of their people; and not to be long absent from their churches." Even in later times, the second Lateran Council enjoins (Can. 10)—"That churches be not committed to hired ministers; but that every church, which has the means, have its own proper priest." And, again, the third Lateran Council directs